

CAPITALIST PENETRATION AND REGIONAL INEQUALITIES IN AFRICA : AN ATTEMPT TO CONCEPTUALISATION

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The purpose of this paper* is to show, within the context of the underdeveloped societies, the incapacity of the conventional analysis to grasp the plenitude of the social phenomenon, in our case that of regional inequalities, its incapacity to grasp this phenomenon in its dynamics, its historical emergence and its development. And to show its incapacity, consequently, to guide a conscious action that aims at the acceleration of the negation of this phenomenon. The alternative is to look for historical concepts theoretically rich.

A student of the problem related to regional inequalities, in African economies, does not start from scratch. He is usually faced by a host of writings on regional development and planning in advanced and underdeveloped economies. These writings imply ideas and conceptions concerning regions and their developments. He is to know about these regional inequalities in analysing

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the historical process through which they have emerged giving place to a number of economic, social and political problems. He must study too, but in a critical manner, the effort of regional development that have been undertaken since the political independence of the African countries. He must study the strategy of growth in general, the theory that underlies, explicitly or implicitly, the regional development efforts, the pattern of organisation conceived for this development, methods and techniques adopted — to appreciate finally, the results of such regional development efforts.

In this paper we limit ourselves to the concepts necessary to a proper understanding of regional inequalities in African economies. And the purpose will be to elaborate a “concept” of region in the context of African economies. This will be done through an attempt to relate the “concept” of region to that of mode of production. To achieve this purpose we will proceed as follows :

1. From the process of production to the concept of mode of production(1)
2. From the concept of mode of production to the capitalist mode of production.
3. From the development of the capitalist mode of production on a world level and its penetration in the pre-capitalist African Societies (modes of production) to the creation of regional inequalities in such societies.

1. We don't intend here to deal with the different visions of the “mode of production”. It suffices for our purpose in this context to arrive at the concept of mode of production in its clearest form. For these different visions see the author's book : *Cours d'Economie politique*, Tom I, *L'Economie politique, une science sociale*, ch. III, F. Maspéro, Paris, 1974, See also, in Arabic, *Political Economy* (with the collaboration of Moustafa Rouchdi). Alexandria, 1973, Ch. III.

4. From all this we reach the region: how it is defined within the framework of the traditional space analysis; the critique of such a definition; the alternative definition and accordingly what should be meant by "regional analysis".

I

Production is effectively a process of collective struggle between Man and Nature. It could be conceived as a double relation : between Man and Nature, and at the same time, between Man and Man.

Man is the only being opposed to Nature. He is a part of it, but opposed to it. And as a being, he has his needs which he cannot satisfy but on acting on the forces of Nature. To satisfy his needs, he pays an effort directed to Nature.

This effort differs from the effort of other beings by being a conscious one : Labour. It is conscious, first, in the sense that Man realises his opposition to Nature. It is conscious, second, in the sense that Man is the only being who imagines the result of his effort in advance (a priori) and adopts the means that enables him to achieve this result. (In this sense, Aristotle tells us that Man is a planning animal).

Through his conscious effort, his labour, Man procures from Nature what is necessary for the satisfaction of his needs which are always changing and developing.

At a certain stage of his development, Man invents what augments the productivity of his labour. the implements, mere extention of his physical power, and the tools.

implements for the production of implements. (In this sense, Franklin defines Man as a tool-making animal).

These instruments are used by him to transform the forces of Nature, the objects of his labour, into products apt to satisfy his needs.

It is this process of labour using the instruments of labour, themselves the product of previous labour, to transform the objects of labour, which is the process of production. A process which is proper to Man, for he is the only animal which produces his means of subsistence. And he does not do it once and for all, but continuously; his struggle against Nature does not stop, it goes through time, from a period to another. It is hence a *process* of production.

This struggle against Nature, Man does not live it individually, but collectively, in society; for Man is a social animal. He realises himself through the others, in labouring together, in cooperation, and in effectuating each a part of the social labour.

The process of production is hence the process of social labour using the available (quantitatively and qualitatively) instruments of labour in the transformation of the forces of Nature, the objects of labour, into products capable of satisfying the material and cultural needs of the members of the society.

All societies have, at one or another period of their history, proved capable of pushing further this process towards better conditions of social life, i. e. capable of development.

The conditions of this process of production are hence :

- The labour force, with a certain technical formation, acquired through the accumulation of knowledge and from generation to generation through practical experience and education.
- The instruments of labour.
- The objects of labour.

Both the instruments of labour and its objects represent the “*means of production*” among which figures the land. They are always means of production of a certain type which implies a certain level of technological achievement.

And both the labour force, having a certain technical formation, and the means of production whose type reflects a certain level of technological achievement, represent what is called the *productive forces* of the society. It goes without saying that the labour force must have the technical formation which enables it to form using the available type of means of production.

This process of production is a collective one. Between men, engaged in their social struggle against Nature, exist the production relations. These relations oscillate around the relation that occurs between men, (a social relation), through the intermediary of the means of production. The legal expression of this relation is *the property of the means of production*.

These relations of production determine for each individual, or group or class :

- his role in the process of production : a user of the means of production (a direct producer) or a mere decision-maker, or both or neither; and
- his share in the social product, the result of the collective struggle against Nature, and consequently the extent to which he will have his needs satisfied (in number and extension).

These are the conditions of the production process which should exist whatever may be the society with which we are dealing. But, seen in this way, they are considered in abstraction, in abstraction from the *social form which their collective union takes and which differs with the development of the society.*

How could we recognise this social form (or what may be called the form of social organisation) of the production process ?

First, in finding out the level of development of the productive forces :

- what sort of labour force we have and what sort of technical knowledge and formation it has ;
- with what sort of means of production it is effecting its labour : when working on the land, for example, what instruments it uses.

Second, what sort of production relations exist between the members of the society :

- who possesses the means of production : the land, the instruments and the objects of labour, and who consequently is divorced from them.

- what rights has each individual or group or class on these means : to use them directly in excluding the others — to put them at the disposal of the others to be used by them in return for a part of the product.

Third, by finding out how the level of development of the productive forces, combined with the existing sort of production relations, are to give the whole process of social labour a *specific form* which differentiates its from the other forms and shows :

- what type of economic activity dominates and how the process of production is socially conducted; the role of each member, or group or class, in the process of social labour;
- is this activity conducted for the immediate satisfaction of wants of the direct producers or for exchange.
- how is the product of the process of social labour distributed among the members, the groups or classes, and in particular what is the destiny of that part of social product which could be called the economic surplus : its form, its appropriation, its utilisations, etc.
- how is the continuity of the process of production, and hence that of the society, guaranteed over time; in other words, how is social reproduction assured.

The specific way in which these "hows" exist gives us the specific combination that could be called a mode

of production. Put simply, it is the way in which a certain society organises its process of social labour 1, *c'est sa manière de produire.*

II

In the context of the study of regional inequalities in African economies, the capitalist mode of production acquires a special importance. For, it is with the development of such a mode, on a world level, that these inequalities emerged.

The main characteristics of this mode of production, which represents a special historical form of exchange production where industry dominates and agriculture becomes itself an industry, are :

- that production relations repose on the private ownership of the means of production that become capital, as a dominating phenomenon ; which means the divorce of the direct producer from the means of production with his labour power becoming a commodity. With the private ownership of the means of production society is composed of three *main* social classes : the capitalist class, the landowners and the

1. The history of human society has known different modes of production. To take examples : in the ancient Greece, we had the esclavagist mode of production where land, which is originally a gift of Nature, becomes landed property; and where labour, which is originally the conscious effort of Man on Nature, becomes slave labour, with the slave himself subjected to property rights. If we take the history of Western Europe since the 9th—10th centuries, we can distinguish two main modes of production : the feudal mode of production, where landed property becomes the dominant social relation with labour becoming serf labour, and the capitalist mode of production. As for Africa before the penetration of capitalist mode of production, we will have the occasion of knowing some types of its modes of production.

working class. And on the basis of these relations of production, social product is distributed between the different classes of the society.

- The immediate objective of production, from the viewpoint of those who take production decisions, is the maximisation of monetary profit.
- The whole economy functions through the market mechanism, through the price mechanism.
- It is a mode of production with an *international nature*. In the process of its development, production and reproduction take place around the *accumulation of capital, which finds its source in the economic surplus accruing not only in the capitalist centers but also in the societies that have been integrated into the world capitalist market.*
- This mode of production *develops through the inequalities* :
 - in the distribution of income between the different social classes,
 - over time : through economic crisis and recessions,
 - between the different branches and sectors of the economy and
 - *between regions, within the advanced capitalist society and the integrated, underdeveloped society.*
- Looked at from the point of view of the underdeveloped economies, the process of the capitalist development on a world scale is that of the integration of the pre-capitalist societies, including the African ones.

To understand the regional inequalities in these societies, one has to have an idea about the modes of production dominating the African societies before direct penetration and the process of their integration into the world capitalist market and the penetration of capital to subordinate any other social relation in these societies. Here, we will limit ourselves to *West Africa's societies which were mainly agricultural but in which trade played a crucial role*¹. Here, we can distinguish three types of social organisation of production :

- the social organisation based on *the village community* with community land property (in East Nigeria, e.g.) ;
- the social organisation based on *small farmers that were producing partly for exchange* during the period of African trade before the capitalist penetration West Nigeria, e.g.), and
- the pseudo-feudal organisation of production in *kingdoms and grand empires*. To be precise, one has to distinguish, as far as West Africa, and especially Nigeria, is concerned, is concerned, between the socio-political organisation of the grand States and that of the coastal cities.

Talking about trade in the States of Guinea (the States of the forested southern half of West Africa : Kanem-Bornu and Hausa Kingdoms, R. Olivier & Fage

1. The colonial period began for Sierra Leone Colony in 1787; for the protectorate in 1896, it began for the Gold Coast Colony in 1874; for Asante in 1902; for Lagos in 1861 and for the Oil Rivers in 1885; for Dahomey in 1892 and the Ivory Coast in 1893. See W.E.F. Ward, *Colonial Rule in West Africa*, in, J. Anene & Brown (eds.), *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. Ibadan University Press & Nelson, Ibadan, 1970, p. 308 & sqq.

write that “demand for luxuries, of course, implies the existence of a *wealthy class*. The first existed in the West Africa in the shape of Kings and their courts, and the specialised professions-administrator, soldiers, artists, metal workers, court musicians, remembranciers, and the like — which they were able to support from *their control of the surplus wealth produced by their subjects*. This surplus flowed into each court in the form of *tribute* in such widely-desired commodities as gold or kola-nuts which made the initiation of international trade possible when outside demand arose.¹ Here we have a social organisation on a class bases with a relatively high level of development of the production forces which allows for the production of a considerable surplus appropriate by the dominating class and partly used in trade².

In some of the coastal *city-states* (as those of the Niger Delta) that was prosperous due to the trade activity prior to their direct colonisation, we had a social organisation known as the “*house*” *system*. “Each city-state comprised a number of “houses”. Now, each “house” was more or less a *trading* association of freemen and slaves under a head or chief. There were usually four social rangs in a “house”. The heads of “houses” formed a sort of advisory council over which presided the king of the city-state “who was to” enforce peace and order, safeguard the interests and privileges of the nobility, and keep the women, slaves and masses of the population

1. A Short History of Africa, Penguin Books, London, 1972, p. 110.

2. See for the Benin State of the Guinea Forest “were the people came into two categories : the nobility and the common people” J.C. ANENE, The Peoples of Benin, the Niger Delta, Congo, Angola in the Nineteenth Century, in, Africa in the 19th & 20th Centurie op, cit., p. 270 — 273.

(supposedly engaged in other economic activity, M.D.) in subjection''1.

We had then different modes of production that dominated the different parts of West African societies at the eve of their penetration by the capitalist mode of production.

III

We cannot deal here with the process of capitalist development on a world level, as the process of the historical formation of under-development as a socio-economic phenomenon, for it represent the whole history of capitalist development and underdevelopment.²

This process of development of the capitalist mode of production affected differently the pre-capitalist African societies (modes of production) :

1. First, the starting point was a pre-colonial Africa that was characterised, by a large number of ethnic groups, or with different modes of production and political organisation (and hence different levels of development).

2. Second, the external, mainly European, impact up to 1885 was very uneven in geographical terms, with the coast being obviously more exposed.

1. Ibid, p. 276.

2. Reference can be made to :

— Walter RODNEYS's simple but profound analysis of this process in his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Tanzania Publishing House Dar-ês Salam, 1972.

— Paul BARAN's more sophisticated analysis of this process in his *Political Economy of Growth*, first published in 1957.

— Thomas SZENTES, *The Political Economy of Underdevelopment*, A Kademiai Kiado, Budapest, 1971.

3. Third, the commerce of Europe affected different aspects of African life in varying degrees, with the political, military and ideological apparatus hardly touched, until the imperialist stage of capitalist development.

4. Fourth, the dynamic features of independent African evolution and development (that existed before the penetration of the capitalist mode of production) continued to operate after 1500. But on the whole in the direction of a loss of development opportunity

To be sure, as J. Saul & R. Woods put it, the colonial situation was everywhere one in which the local (agricultural) population were both exposed to new goods and services and, in many cases, subjected to specific governments—enforced economic or labour demands with the result that new needs were generated which could only be met by participation in cash-based market economy. Two ways of participation were open to them :

- sale of their labour power,
- or sale of their agricultural product.

And within this broad process four variables have been of particular importance in defining the nature of the integration in the overall system by the African agricultural producers through which they acquired, in effect, their peasant characteristics :

These variables are :

1. The presence, or otherwise, of centres of labour demand, such as mines, industries and the like. (This was partly done by a physical shift of the African peasants through slave trade, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, where the demand for labour existed in the countries of the

New World. The effect of this trade was different in the different parts of African societies). This would lead to the development of labour-exporting peasantries. A development which reflects also in some instances the degree to which adult men were under-employed in the pre-capitalist agriculture and hence the extent to which they could be absent without threatening the security of minimal subsistence production which assures the production of the labour force.

2. The presence, or otherwise, of a suitable local environment for the production of agricultural crops for sale with the degree of availability of marketing opportunities for these crops. (Here the factors involved are: the natural endowment and the degree of integration in the capitalist market). The extent to which the peasantry could respond to cash cropping depended on the adaptability of the pre-capitalist agriculture to the incorporation of new crops without threatening the security of minimal subsistence production. This adaptability was higher in areas where dominated, before capitalist penetration, a social organisation of production based on small farmers producing partly for exchange (West Nigeria, e.g.).

3. The presence, or otherwise, of an immigrant settler group of capitalist farmers who would be competitors with African producers 1.

As a result, in each territory, given its natural endowment and the mode of production dominant prior to capitalist penetration, a number of peasantries who are differentiated according to locality :

1. See J. S. Saul & R. Woods, African Peasantries, in Peasants and Peasant Society, T. Shamin (ed.) Penguin Readings, 1971, p. 107 & Sqq.

- some localities being labour exporting;
- some being food-crop exporting;
- some cash-crops exporting, and
- some with varying proportions of each.

These differentiations will often coincide with, and be reinforced by, localised cultural identifications, often of an ethnic or tribal nature.

Of course this pattern cannot be a static one, but rather one changing over time as the whole system develops.¹

If we add to this, that some localities are characterised by the dominance of capitalist agriculture (foreign or local), and that some others (urban) by the existence of services (administrative, banking, commercial and others) necessary for production and exchange between the different localities and the rest of the World, especially the capitalist centres, and that in such urban localities live the representatives of international corporations, immigrant settlers and immigrant traders, indigenous traders and indigenous so-called elites who (basing themselves upon educational attainment and, in some cases, upon political skills) under certain circumstances could take over formal political power from the colonial regime, if we add all this we arrive at the differences which express *regional inequalities*, result of the integration of different modes of

1. The dynamics of capitalist development tends to introduce a further element which cuts across the differentiation of peasants by locality with a differentiation based on the degree of involvement in the cash economy. This involves the possible movements towards proletarianisation of migrant labourers on the one hand and towards capitalist agriculture on the other and these two can clip away at the peasantry, pulling it in different directions. J. Saul & R. Woods, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

production in African pre-capitalist societies into the capitalist world economy.

And with the political independence, a balkanisation of Africa has taken place through the creation of political units (States) which do not correspond neither to ethnic and cultural groupings nor to more or less homogeneous "regions". *How can we define then a region ?*

IV

In the after Second World War period, regional inequalities were flagrantly showing themselves in the Western capitalist countries. These inequalities called not only for regional development policies (*aménagement des territoires* but) also for a host of *space analysis* that came to make afterwards a part of the theoretical exportation towards the underdeveloped countries.

According to the advocates of these analysis, three different approaches have been used in *defining regions*:

- the first stresses *homogeneity* with respect to some one or combination of physical, economic, social or other characteristics (but mainly in terms of natural endowment and basic services, especially transport);

1. The integration of the pre-capitalist mode of production in the capitalist market was *not even over time*. For in some parts of the African societies, it was delayed by the resistance of the previously well organised societies. This resistance affected too the modality of capitalist penetration through its effect on the attitude of the colonial power towards the resisting societies. An attitude which affects, in its turn, the changes that these societies have to undergo. In this sense too, the pre-capitalist mode of production had its effects on the emergence of regional inequalities. (See as an example the resistance of Benin and the States of North Nigeria, a resistance that caused less capitalist penetration in the North and affected the educational policy of the colonial power, which was for less education opportunities in the North and more opportunities, especially through missionary education, in the South, for the purpose of the formation of necessary civil servants. See J.C. Anene, *op. cit.*, p. 273-275.

- the second emphasises the so-called *nodality of polarisation* usually around some central urban place;
- the third is policy-oriented, concerned mainly with *administrative* coherence or identity between the area being studied and available political institutions for effectuating policy decisions¹.

But all these definitions are, to say the least, of a simplest nature, for :

- they are based on an erroneous idea of space, and
- missing this scientific approach, which when considering social phenomena, must be historical.

We take, first, the *significance of space*. In their view, space is a mere geographical distance, to be measured by the transport cost. "It will be admitted, according to Tinbergen and others, that the most important aspect of space in economic matters is the existence of transportation. Therefore, we think that the best economic measure of space must be based on the level of transportation costs for a number of commodities"².

This might be a geographical definition of space, but *in Economics, a science that deals with social relations occurring through the intermediary of material things, space cannot be but the geographical distribution of production relations.*

1. See Jos G. Hilhorst, *Regional Planning, A system Approach*, Rotterdam University Press, 1971, p. 5 & sqq.

See also the ECAFE paper on "Comprehensive Regional Development Planning" Presented to the Sixth Interregional Seminar on Development Planning (Regional Planning). Quito, 20 sep. — 10 Oct, 1971, P.6.

2. L. Meunes, J. Tinbergen & J. Waandenburg: *The Element of Space in Development Planning*. North-Holland Publishing Company. Amsterdam, 1969, P.2.

It is the location, over the society's territories, of these production relations and the whole supra-structure they underlay. On the basis of this idea of space, and interested in "regions" in the African context, the approach to their definition must be, as we have seen, historical :

- to start with the mode of production dominant in the precapitalist African societies, given the natural endowment;
- to analyse the process of integration and its effects;
- to see the political division of Africa in States.

It is only in adopting such approach that we can arrive at "regions" within a political unit, a state, and in more than one state.

And for regions within the state, the differences between them might manifest themselves, given the endowment, in :

- different modes of production dominant before pre-capitalist penetration;
- different modality of capitalist penetration (through slave trade or other modality);
- the different degrees of integration in the world capitalist market;
- difference in the specific role played by the region within the whole capitalist system :
 - mainly reserve of cheap labour force,
 - mainly source of cheap food for local labour force,

- mainly source of agricultural raw materials, cocoa, cotton,
- mainly source for mineral : copper, oil;
- according to their different roles they might have different supplies of basic services (especially trading and transportation); and here, it appears clearly that the transport is a dependent variable and not an independent one;
- differences, in ethnic and cultural groups.

But, whatever the difference between these regions (within the State), they all have in common :

- a subordinate nature, for they represent parts of a dependent economy within the capitalist world market. A part of their economic surplus is mobilised towards the metropolitan centres.
- for each of these regions, the process of mobilisation of the surplus is realised through a physical polarisation (which materialises a certain socio-political subordination) around some urban places, towns, which represent mere «stops» in the way towards the real metropolitan centres. And for these towns or «stops» the *function* is well defined : they are not meant to provide the countryside with what towns provide agriculture in the capitalist centres. They are meant to collect agricultural and mining products (with some processing if necessary) and export them, and to distribute imports between the different parts of the underdeveloped economy.

Hence, the pattern of location of the African towns :

- the location of the major urban agglomerations usually the capital of the country, is on the coast (Mention can be made of most of the capitals of West Africa's countries from Dakar to Lagos, passing by Conakry, Freetown, Abidjan and Accra).
- the location at inland ports : river and lake ports.
- the location at important nodes of land routes, and
- the location of towns in the areas of mining activities and where the climatic factor favours the settlement of Europeans(1).

The whole locational pattern of African towns, excepting the pre-colonial ones, is determined by the dependent nature of the economies and their concentrations towards the metropolitan centres; and within each African economy the pattern of location of internal towns is determined by the degree of subordination of the region and the role it plays in the whole capitalist system.

- A third feature in common between the different regions of an underdeveloped economy, is that, since the political independence, the State might play an intermediary role between the region and the international capital.

Seen in this way, a *regional analysis* means an analysis given the natural endowment :

- of the social organisation of production in the region, especially in agriculture;

1. See E.O. Adeniyi, The Role of African Cities in Development Paper presented to U.N. IDEP Seminar on Regional Planning, Ibadan, April, 1973, p. 4—6.

- of the degree of its integration in the capitalist market;
- to find out the class-structure for the rural and the non-rural population which gives the regions its specificity within the ensemble : the subordinated and repressed classes and stratum, their life conditions, their mobility, etc.;
- all this for the region, in its relation with other regions and with the metropolitan centre. To find out whether this relation is direct or indirect through another region and whether it is established through selling its labour power and its commodities or through buying, or through both of them and the terms of trade...and so on. To find out which of the classes of the region is in contradiction or in conciliation with the metropolitan centre;
- to see as a result, the region's lot in so-called infrastructure basic services corresponding the pattern of income distribution and to the role played by the region in the whole system.

Accordingly, a region will be defined, given its natural endowment, according to the specificity of its social organisation of production, and in under-developed societies, according to the specificity of its subordination to capital, and consequently, the role it plays in the production and the mobilisation of a certain type of surplus towards the metropolitan centre.